

COMPENSATION OF DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS AND THE CREWS OF LIFE-SAVING STATIONS.

MARCH 31, 1896.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. WANGER, from the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany H. R. 2757.]

The Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 2757) to fix the compensation of district superintendents and of the crews of life-saving stations, have had the same under consideration, and regard the measure as simple justice and sound policy.

The subjects are so fully discussed by the Superintendent of the Life-Saving Service in his last annual report, extracts from which are contained in the accompanying letter, in which Acting Secretary of the Treasury Wike concurs, that the committee do not deem further elaboration or reiteration essential.

The duties of the district superintendents are onerous and involve (in several of the districts) considerable expenditures for clerk hire. The faithful discharge of the duties of the position also involves considerable peril. Two of these district superintendents have lost their lives, one in an effort to relieve a wrecked vessel and the other in visiting stations, and a third died from the effect of exposure in the performance of duty.

In reporting a bill to the Forty-seventh Congress to promote the efficiency of the Life-Saving Service the Committee on Commerce said of keepers and surfmen:

* * * It is the further opinion of your committee that few employees of this Government have received in the past so meager and inadequate compensation; that despite disheartening neglect and indifference to the value of their service, these men have struggled on to unexpected successes and results flattering to this country, is the most potent argument for an immediate and just recognition of their worth. As mentioned in the report to the Secretary of the Treasury by the General Superintendent of the Life-Saving Service, it is a matter of fact that while the loss of life from marine disaster has steadily increased during recent years the world over, it has markedly decreased upon the shores of the United States, until the relative difference shows a diminution in loss of life of 75 per cent, although shipwrecks have not lessened in frequency. This gratifying result is to be attributed directly to the efficiency of the Life-Saving Service of this country.

But the ever-increasing importance of the maritime commerce of the United States brings an urgent demand for a still greater efficiency of the Life-Saving Service and a more general distribution of well-organized stations upon its coast. Men of tried ability and long experience are demanded in these hazardous and perilous emergencies, which are of constant occasion on all shores, and which demand instant and able relief.

It is gratifying to be able to use these encomiums of the Life-Saving Service at this time, and to note the more general distribution of well-organized stations upon the coast of the United States. This more

perfect development of the system naturally entails greater labor and responsibility upon the district superintendents and justifies greater compensation. While the law does not impose upon district superintendents the duty of personally participating in the relief of wrecked vessels, they are called upon in the more important cases of a perilous character, and the effect of example practically calls upon them oft-times to lead in danger—a consideration of moment in the determination of their salaries.

The increase in the rate of compensation to surfmen applies in but a few instances, the provision making the compensation uniform and removing a cause of dissatisfaction among the men and a discrimination between sections, as fully explained by Superintendent Kimball, whose letter is adopted as part of this report.

The committee recommend that the bill do pass.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT LIFE-SAVING SERVICE,
Washington, D. C., January 25, 1896.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your reference, for report, of the letter of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives, dated January 6, 1896, transmitting House bill 2757, "To fix the compensation of district superintendents and of the crews of life-saving stations," for suggestions touching the merits of the bill and the propriety of its passage.

In reply I have the honor to state that in my annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1895, which has been submitted to you, but is now in the hands of the Public Printer, I fully discussed the subject-matter of the bill and made recommendations for changes practically in accordance with its provisions, giving my reasons therefor. I quote from the report as follows:

COMPENSATION OF DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS.

"In the estimates of appropriations required by the Life-Saving Service for the current year an increase of \$300 in the salaries of each of three of the district superintendents was submitted, the reasons for the recommendation being stated in a note appended to the estimates, as follows:

"The salaries of the superintendents of the First, Second, and Fifth districts, for an increase in which of \$300 each an estimate is submitted, were fixed at the present rates by the act of May 4, 1882. At that time the number of stations in the First district was 7; in the Second, 15, and in the Fifth, 11. The bonds which they were then required to give amounted, respectively, to \$20,000, \$25,000, and \$25,000. Since then the number of stations in these districts has been increased, so that there are now in the First district 12 stations, in the Second, 23, and in the Fifth 17, and other stations are authorized by law to be established in each. The sums of money which now have to be placed in the hands of these officers for disbursement have made it necessary to exact additional bonds, which now amount, respectively, to \$30,000, \$50,000, and \$40,000.

"The fact that the first district includes a smaller number of stations than the other two is fully offset by the greater extent of territory which it embraces, and the additional hardships and privations that must be endured on account of the severity of the winters in this latitude in making the required visits to the stations. The wide separation of the stations from each other and their great distance from the superintending office also largely increase the difficulties of exercising proper supervision. The present compensation of the three superintendents above referred to is entirely inadequate to the duties they perform, and the proposed increase would put them more nearly on an equal footing with the superintendents of the other districts."

"This estimate was approved by the Secretary of the Treasury and submitted to Congress. The increase recommended would have involved an addition to the annual expenditures of \$900. Congress, however, appropriated a uniform rate of \$1,600 per annum as compensation for each of the twelve district superintendents embraced in the Service, reducing the salaries of eight of them \$200 each below the rate established by the act of May 4, 1882, and increasing those of four \$100 each—a net reduction of \$1,200 per annum. This action inflicted serious injustice upon eight deserving officers already underpaid, and fell short of doing justice to three of the

remaining four, while it extended to the fourth an unsolicited and unnecessary increase.

"With the exception of the officer just referred to, who has charge of the Seventh district, in which there are but two stations manned by crews (the remaining nine being merely houses of refuge in charge of keepers only), all the superintendents have duties of a very onerous, responsible, and exacting character. They are charged with the direct control and management of the service in their respective districts, which include the selection and nomination of the station keepers, the supervision of the selection of the crews by the keepers, which under the law must be made with exclusive reference to fitness, the enforcement of proper discipline, the instruction and drilling of the crews, the ascertainment of the needs of the stations as to appliances, equipments, and supplies, making requisition for what is wanted, etc., and as paymasters of their respective districts they are required to disburse large amounts of public funds, on account of which the heavy bonds specified in the above note are exacted.

"The mere accounting and clerical work incident to the performance of these duties is sufficient to occupy nearly or quite all of their time, and most of them have to employ clerical assistance at their own expense to enable them to make their required visits to the stations. But it is obvious that the clerical work is of minor importance compared with their other duties, and calls into exercise the least important of their qualifications, the chief of which are necessarily of an exceptional character, involving a technical knowledge of surfmanship and life-saving methods not often found combined with the requisite business training. Furthermore, the possession of good judgment, sound discretion, unswerving integrity, uncompromising moral courage, and a standing in the community that commands respect and confidence are indispensable. To these considerations should be added the fact that these officers in their official routine are exposed to hardships and dangers which do not fall to the lot of ordinary officeholders.

"During the active season, which embraces the most inclement portions of the year, they have to make frequent visits to the several stations in their respective districts, in most instances extending hundreds of miles along desolate and inhospitable coasts and distant from railroad facilities; often through storms and drifting snows, sometimes camping out and subsisting upon rough fare; frequently making their way in small boats upon dangerous waters, and always under circumstances as widely at variance as is conceivable with the comforts and luxuries of ordinary travel. They are, moreover, frequently summoned by the keepers to trying scenes of shipwreck where all efforts at rescue have proved fruitless and inevitable failure seems imminent, and on these occasions they assume command. In several such instances successful issues have resulted; but their heroic struggles are not always so rewarded, nor are the hardships and perils of their calling always encountered with impunity. Out of the small number of these officers two have perished by drowning; one has escaped that fate only by mere chance after prolonged suffering in the water, and one has died from exposure.

"It is submitted that it is neither right nor creditable to a great nation to dole out to men like these a paltry pittance of compensation that barely affords them a decent livelihood. All of them for whom an increase of pay is herein recommended have the supervision of a large number of men—the keepers and crews of the stations in their respective districts, in one district 328, and an average in the 11 districts in question of 160. To other official positions involving the supervision of even a smaller force of employees, and having no responsibility in the disbursement of public funds, has been attached a compensation of \$2,500 or \$3,000 per annum, and it would seem that the smaller of these sums, at least, should be accorded to those under consideration."

PAY OF SURFMEN.

"The act approved July 22, 1892, increasing the compensation of all surfmen from \$50 to \$65 per month, relieved the Service of the difficulty it had for a considerable period experienced in enlisting and retaining competent men for the crews, and although the rate then fixed was smaller than many thought should have been accorded, it sufficed to secure the requisite ability and to restore content in the stations.

"The act of August 3, 1894, extending the period of active service upon the Atlantic and Gulf coasts two additional months (May and August), however, created a new disturbance which threatened results scarcely less disastrous to the morale of the Service than those which were apprehended and were making themselves apparent in consequence of the insufficient wages provided for the men previous to the increase of 1892.

"This discontent sprang from a clause contained in the act which provided that all surfmen serving more than eight months should receive but \$60 per month during

the period of their service, and thus made a discrimination in the rate of compensation chiefly against those serving in a large proportion of the stations on the lakes, but also against many on the ocean coasts, and gave rise to many difficult questions of construction in the administration of the law. These difficulties were set forth to some extent in the last annual report, and attention was called to the necessity for remedial legislation. A provision inserted in the act making appropriations for the maintenance of the service for the current fiscal year, extending the rate of \$65 per month to all surfmen serving for a period of eight and one-half months, obviated many of the difficulties, but a serious one yet remains, the discrimination now being chiefly in favor of the lake as against the ocean coasts, and in favor of one man in each of the 154 manned stations on the Atlantic Coast, as against his comrades in the same station and all others employed on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

"This happens on account of the fact that the term of active service upon the lakes, being from the opening to the close of navigation, rarely or never exceeds eight and one-half months, and from the circumstance that in each of the 154 stations on the Atlantic, an extra man is employed from December 1 to May 1, a period of less than eight and one-half months.

"The surfmen upon the lakes, therefore, and the extra man referred to (their term of service being within eight and one-half months), receive \$65 per month, while all the others receive but \$60.

"The sense of injustice which this inequality produces among the men naturally creates much discontent and inharmony, besides provoking constant efforts and contention on the part of the best surfmen upon a large extent of the Atlantic Coast to obtain a shorter period of service; it being a fact, which the authors of the law in question were apparently unaware of, that upon many portions of the Atlantic Coast the services of the men expert in surfing, boating, and fishing, command much better wages during the late spring, summer, and autumn months than have ever been paid in the Life-Saving Service.

"The interests of the service no less than simple justice demand that the compensation of surfmen shall be made uniform at whatever rate, and it is believed that \$65 per month, the rate established by the act of July 22, 1892, is none too large."

I believe, therefore, the passage of the bill would greatly promote the welfare of the Service.

Respectfully, yours,

S. I. KIMBALL,
General Superintendent.

The SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.